1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
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a mat or a cloth, supported in a reclining position with pillows and cloths, or on a covered box standing about a foot from the ground, with her legs drawn up. No fire is built in the house, all doors and windows are tightly shut, and covers are provided against a chill. A candle stands lighted at the threshold, and holy water is poured beside it; a candle is also often lighted in the church before the statue of the saint who corresponds to the *vodun* deity under whose protection the woman in labor is thought to be. In the room with her is the midwife and as many as six, seven, eight, or nine older women belonging to the families of the woman and her husband. The hands of the woman are made to rest on her knees, but where labor is prolonged, her arms are supported above her head to afford relief. She is three times given very hot tea or a drink made of the stewed leaves of the mango tree and of the *bois lait*. The midwife, with palm oil on her hands, watches the rhythm of labor and presses on the abdomen to facilitate delivery.

If it becomes evident that this will be difficult, a *vodun* priest is at once called to determine by divination whether or not the deities who have been propitiated are satisfied. If the answer is a negative one, he promises future sacrifices or gives minor offerings immediately. Care is also taken to ascertain whether the trouble is due to the discontent of the family dead who may have been angered by neglect to wear mourning for them, or because sacrifices or a *service* due them have been delayed too long. Inquiries are similarly made to determine whether the spirits of twins might not be displeased, while the possibility that evil magic may have been invoked is not overlooked, especially if the husband has several wives. If the inquiry shows that the magic of a co-wife was responsible, a strong counter-charm is made at once. Should the woman in labor eventually die, however, her death is not considered to be the result of any act of infidelity on her part, and does not, as in other Negro cultures, prevent the usual burial and mourning customs being carried out.

1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
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its good health or good looks or some other attribute may unwittingly bring harm to it. For such reasons the child is often burned slightly on the cheek, a ritual carried out by the *vodun* priest in order that the scar may "give one with evil intentions toward the child an 'occupation' to divert his attention, that would otherwise be devoted to carrying out some evil design."

There is some question as to whether, as in so many Negro cultures, the child is given a special name at birth which is regarded as sacred and a thing to be concealed. In one instance it was stated that while one's "real" name was that given at the time of the Church baptism, everyone has a "nickname" (*petit nom*) that is known to the father and mother alone until the child is old enough to guard its secret character. This name is never spoken aloud, for if an enemy came to know it, he might use it for purposes of black magic against its owner. However, no agreement exists in Mirebalais as to this practice, which may represent a survival of a widespread West African custom.[3]

A child born with a caul is believed to be "strong" in combating all evil spirits. The caul is dried and reduced to powder, and the infant is given some of the powder in water two or three days after birth. If a child is born with the navel cord wrapped about his throat, he is believed by some to be destined for leadership, though others do not hold this to be a significant omen. A child born feet-foremost is regarded with distaste, so that where possible, he is turned about in the womb to facilitate a head presentation. If this cannot be done, the child when he grows up is reproached: "You came like a demon." More often, however, if a child with breech presentation is not stillborn, it is not believed that he will long survive. All such occurrences are attributed to bad magic, and the husband does not delay to seek out a diviner to discover for him what supernatural forces had caused the evil.

Breast-feeding begins on the third day, but if the milk does

1: Herskovits E-4, 6 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
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CHAPTER XI

THE CULT OF TWINS AND OF THE DEAD

SHARING powers and prerogatives with the *loa* in the supernatural world are the souls of the dead, the spirits of twins, and, in a specialized sense, magic, all working parts of a universe the ultimate force in which is God, who is sometimes spoken of as its Gran' Mait'. Their relative importance, however, is not easy to determine; and much less the manner in which the supernatural personalities in these divisions are linked with one another. Therefore, when such problems are presented to a group of Haitians, as whether or not the dead become *loa*, or the spirits of twins are related to those of the dead, or whether twins are the equivalent of the *loa*, or what the role of all these in magic may be, different opinions will always be heard.

One of these matters was explained by an elderly *hunsi* as follows: "*Marassa gagné morts longtemps, li deviennent loa* — Twins who have been dead a long time become *loa*," and "*Gagné gran' moun morts longtemps, deviennent loa* — There are those long dead who become *loa*," and she added: "But how this happens, I do not know." Despite a flat contradiction of this opinion by a man who was present, and a heated discussion between them, she persisted in maintaining the

1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
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correctness of her view, while making an honest avowal of her inability to explain how this came about. On another occasion discussion turned upon the manner in which the powers of these supernatural beings are conceived in various parts of Haiti. Said one *hungan:* " Twins are stronger than the saints (the *loa*) . The *marassa* are the mothers of the saints. So it is said at Arcahaie." The reply came: " In Mirebalais they say the saints are stronger."

During a lively discussion of the point by a group of active voduists the suggestion was made by one that the relative power of the *loa,* the dead, and the twins might be determined if the numerical strength of the following of each cult could be roughly ascertained. Since all give sacrifices for the dead — even strict Church members — and all who worship the *loa* give for the *loa* and the dead, while only some of this latter group give for the *loa,* the twins, and the dead, the person who had suggested this line of inquiry concluded that the dead were therefore strongest, because no one dared ignore them. Still another opinion, though in agreement with this, was based rather on the fact that the *loa* always exhibit fear before manifestations of death, as at dances where persons possessed by Damballa or Aida Wedo avoid those possessed by Gede, since he stands so close to the dead. However, it was pointed out by others in Mirebalais that the most costly and elaborate offerings are for the *loa,* that those for the dead are smaller, and those given the twins are least impressive, which was evidence enough for them that the *loa* are the most powerful of these three categories. All agreed, however, in ascribing to the twins the least power of the three, though what the *marassa* do for good or evil they do with intensity and dispatch.

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There is ample justification, on both theological and historical grounds, for placing twins and the dead in a single general category. For, as one educated Haitian put it in pointing out that both twins and dead are worshipped on the same day, "*Marassa et morts font une chapitre pour nous* — The twins and the dead make a single chapter for us."

1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
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twins and the dead make a single chapter for us." This point of view is supported by a study of the twin cult as found in that part of West Africa from which so much of Haitian culture came, where a single category of the supernatural world, comprising all ancestors, includes both twins and the dead, as well as all others "who have passed through the womb of a woman." As might be expected, the concept is more elaborated in West Africa than in Haiti; but the important point is that in Haiti, though less explicitly formulated, it has persisted.

To worship twins it is not necessary either for a family to number them among its members of this generation, or to have included them within the memory of those living, for it is sufficient if a tradition exists that twins had once been born to some member of the family. If the twins are alive or lived in recent times, sacrifices are given both at Christmas and at harvest time; otherwise only at Christmas. Some families, indeed, worship twins because a *hungan* has divined that their unknown ancestors in "Guinée" had included them. There are still others who decide to worship the *marassa* without the advice of a diviner, because certain benefits are believed to come to those who worship twins, because of their power for good or evil.[1]

The source of this power is vague; one characteristic answer to a question concerning it was: "Their power comes from God. Do we ourselves know how twins are made?" It is agreed, however, that St. Nicholas is their spiritual father —an opinion based on the tale of this saint, held to have been a sorcerer who, in very early times, killed three *marassa* (the twins themselves and the *dosu*, or child after twins) and salted them away in a barrel. The mother of the children came to him to offer up her prayers, and, touched by her sorrow, he resuscitated them, since when he has been their "father." The power of twins, whatever its source, is very real to the Haitians. They are believed to be able to predict rain, for ex-

1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
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845 ample, long before ordinary folk.[9] If promised offerings in the
event of an ample harvest, their aid in bringing about this
desired end is even more fruitful than that of the *loa* or the
dead, who are therefore appealed to only indirectly.

Twins, however, are capricious beings, ready to do harm if they are not humored. Consequently, twins must be given anything they ask for, and it is especially important to provide them with the clothes they covet, when giving a *mangé marassa*. If their father fails to provide these new clothes, they will *kembé* (seize) him, and he may at once have an attack of fever or a bad toothache or earache; or, more likely still, he will be seriously constipated, since this is the punishment particularly favored by the *marassa*, just as the *loa* most frequently send dysentery, and the dead cause headaches. If lack of resources makes it impossible to provide what they demand, a painstaking explanation must be given them or they will drive a person mad in the manner recounted in the following *marassa* myth:

> There were once twins, one good and one evil. They were working a field with another brother, but the evil one refused to help. The other two, therefore, said they would not give him any food. Because of this the evil twin drove the third brother insane. After they had long prayed that he reconsider, he finally agreed to restore sanity to his brother, but insisted on inflicting deafness as a punishment, so that this brother was deaf until he died.

845 At the birth of twins, special "twin plates" are provided
when their birth is announced to the *loa* — either before *or*
after their Church baptism — where offerings to the spirits of
twins are placed. Usually paired, the plates may be three in
number, in which case the third is for the *dosu*, the child born
after twins, who is believed to be even more powerful than
twins themselves and is thus an important figure in the cult.

1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
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Preferably, these cult objects are made of pottery, joined by a ligature in twos or threes, as required. The plates rest in a box or on a small table which stands in a corner of an inner room of the house. If the family worshipping the twins is a poor one, joined calabashes or wooden plates are acceptable, and such are found more often in the valley of Mirebalais than pottery plates. The "altar" made by the plates is completed by an *image* — a chromolithograph — of the twin saints, Comas and Damien, placed on the wall above them.

The principal rite of the twin cult is the *mangé marassa*. A minor ceremony, if the family has living twins or twins recently dead, it is held, as has already been said, at Christmas and at harvest time; otherwise only at Christmas. Yams and salt fish are separately cooked, and a dish of beans mixed with olive oil is provided. In the morning this food is taken to a closed room, where it is deposited both in the *marassa* plates and in ordinary containers placed for those who attend the rite. As the offering is made, songs such as the following are sung:

Marassa, m'a pé mandé,	Spirit of twins, I ask,
Ça wé la si 'ou content?	Are you content with what you see there?
Ago-e-e.	*Ago-e-e.*
Adoré nan pié Damballa,	Worship at the tree of Damballa,
Ago-e-e.	*Ago-e-e.*
Marassa bra,	Twins of the forest,
Marassa carrefour,	Twins of the crossroad,
M'a pé mandé,	I ask,
Ça wé la si 'ou content?	Are you content with what you see there?
Adoré nan pié humfort,	Worship at the *humfort*,
Assuré-e, ago!	Care for us, *ago!*
Marassa dé, trois, quatre,	Twins two, three, four,

1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
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845 767 [533] [539]

M'a pé mandé, I ask,
Ça wé la si 'ou content? Are you content with what you see there?

The food is eaten the same afternoon. If the twins are actually alive, everything they wear must be new and they must have identical clothes. At the sacrifice of the January harvest, native rice, cakes, okra, bananas, and one, two, or three chickens, designated by the twins themselves, are offered. The food is put in place, and as songs are sung it is left until the following day, when it is eaten. The worship of [184] twins differs markedly in various parts of Haiti. In Leogane, for example, some have such a ceremony only at harvest time, and have a greater *mangé marassa* every five years, when a goat and a chicken are killed and offered with the usual non-animal foods.

845 [171] [184] [769] Twins stand in a peculiarly intimate relation to each other, as might be expected from the traditional African belief that twins share a single soul, which, as far as could be determined, only survives in attitude in Mirebalais. Should one die, the living twin must put aside a bit of all food he eats, or a small part of any gift given him, for the other. If the twins are both girls, the attempt is usually made to have them betrothed and married at about the same time. If the female twin of a pair is married, she must give a present to her twin brother, and similarly her husband sees to it that his wife's male twin also receives a substantial gift from him as a peace offering, for it is dangerous to wait until the other decides on some overt mischief. The perplexing factor in dealing with twins is that they themselves often do not consciously will the trouble they bring. For example, should the twin of a married woman not feel friendly toward his sister's husband, though he might make a conscious effort to overcome this dislike, his spirit might proceed to use its full power to harass the man in such a way as to trouble the relationship of the couple.

1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 5V3 Haiti 5V3
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[6] Price-Mars (I), 206, note 1, and Wirkus, 215, define the term *combite*.

[7] Wirkus, 51, 288, differentiates these work-drums from other types.

[8] Wirkus, 191, has described the efficiency with which an organized Haitian work-group accomplished its task on the road.

[9] Cf. Price-Mars (I), 146–8.

[10] A good description of a Haitian market as observed in 1835 is to be found in Hanna, 53–6.

[11] Compare Mackenzie, i, 28–9.

[12] The poverty of the Haitians is often exaggerated, and especially the concept of wealth as held by the peasant is caricatured in a way that accentuates a misunderstanding of his economic psychology. For an extreme instance of this see Craige, 42–3.

CHAPTER V

[1] Price-Mars (I), 34, speaks of the need immediately after birth of "immersing the newborn infant in a lustral bath carefully concocted by the *vodun* priest who consecrates the child to the divinity that can preserve him against the evil-doing of malignant spirits, and rescue him from 'the power of supernatural ills.'"

[2] Craige, 68–9, and Wirkus, 97–9, both give accounts of wayside births in which the mothers resumed their journeys immediately after bearing their children.

[3] Price-Mars (I), 34, says: "It is forbidden to speak aloud the 'baptismal' name of a child under certain circumstances, above all during the night."

[4] Parsons (I), 174, notes that "an infant born with teeth is one whose birth has been delayed so long by the *marassa* [twins] that the teeth have developed."

[5] Price-Mars (I), 235, derives the importance of the godmother from the conditions of slavery, when a child was often cared for by a foster-mother. See also St. Mery, i, 35–6, and Mackenzie, i, 273–4.

CHAPTER VI

[1] The institution of *plaçage* is mentioned in passing by Craige, 203–4, and, with complete lack of understanding, by Wirkus, 75 and 307.

2: Courlander B-5 (1937-1955) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

offending them. They are also vain and capricious, can be conciliated by prayers and gifts, and propitiated by sacrifices. This animistic religion . . . includes many variants of the worship of countless spirits of men's ancestors and innumerable spirits of nature, all ranking as gods.[1]

Another observer, speaking of the Bapindi, the Babunda, and other related tribes of the western Congo draws quite similar conclusions:

The people of these tribes recognize a supreme deity, Nzambi, creator of all things. But this supreme spirit is too distant from men to enlist active worship on their part. The basic worship is to the ancestors of the clan. The clan is in effect a community consisting of all the living and the dead descended from a common ancestor. Towards the dead it is necessary to make offerings as a mark of deference when one wishes to consult them on problems. The dead are spoken to through the chief, who uses a special drum for this purpose. The dead have the responsibility of protecting their descendants.[2]

Among the Bantu people of South Africa, also, the worship of ancestors is based upon the belief that when a man dies he continues to influence the lives of his relatives remaining on earth. He is as interested as ever in descendants who remain "outside on the earth," but indifferent to members of other communities unless they bear them some grudge. The characters of people who die are not changed by death. They are as prone to jealousy in death as in life, and as rancorous toward descendants who wound their vanity, flout their wishes, squander their bequests, or infringe the ancient laws and customs of their clans; but they are also as willing as ever to help those of their lineage who treat them with becoming respect and obedience.[3] The affairs of mankind in general do not concern them; they are exclusively interested in their own family and tribe, and without their help and guidance their living descendants cannot hope to flourish. As long as the moral code is strictly followed, they confer blessings and abundance; but if offended by any breach of custom, they can also send drought, cattle plague, tribal or personal disaster, sickness, or death.[4]

This deeply rooted concept of the relationship of the family to its ancestors continues to motivate the Haitian in his observance of services for the dead.

In addition to the ordinary dead with whom the Haitian has to deal, there are the spirits of twins, known as *marassas*. As there are feasts for the ordinary family dead, the mangé morts, so there are feasts for living and dead twins, the mangé marassas. Twins are believed to have special powers, and even when alive they are given more than usual consideration. The spirits of dead twins are especially willful and capricious, and unless properly placated they may cause illness and misfortune. Once each year, on dates fixed by local custom, special services are held for the marassas.

[1, 2] [Footnotes appear on p. 350, Category 116.--Analyst]

[3] [Willoughby, The Soul of The Bantu, pp. 88-89. Cf. p. 350, Category 116.--Analyst]

[4] [Footnote appears on p. 350, Category 116.--Analyst]

2: Courlander B-5 (1937-1955) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

769 845 The dead twins are offered food in special earthen or gourd bowls. In any market place where pottery is sold you will find the joined marassa double or triple bowls. The annual rites for the marassas are routine, but once every five years there is a *grande service* for them.

It is not merely the twins of one's immediate family that are served, but twins—that is, the spirit of twins—in general. They are supplicated even when a family knows of no incidence of twins. In part, this precaution is a recognition that there may have been twins among ancestors long dead and forgotten. It is also recognition of a twin spirit as a separate force affecting all people. The twin spirit has been personified in the loa named Marassa. The child born after twins is believed by many Haitians to be even "stronger" and more to be placated than twins themselves. He is known as a *doçu* if a boy, *doça* if a girl. Their patron loa are known as Marassa Doçu and Marassa Doça. The patron loa of triplets is Marassa Trois. Triplets are regarded as a special category of twins. Some Haitians, in fact, believe that the twins are merely a partial manifestation of the group of three, which is completed on the birth of the doçu or doça. In the marassa feast, triplets are served in the triple clover-leaf bowl, as are twins in combination with their doçu or doça. It is also believed by some that the child born before twins is "weak" both in physical vitality and psychic powers, because his strength has been sapped by the marassas who have followed him.

[196] 776 768 [184] For some Haitians the loa Marassa is the most potent of forces to be placated at the time of death. They hold that he is only incidentally the patron of twins and triplets. His significance is said to lie in the fact that he is the spirit of the first of all human children who died. And as the child precedes the man, Marassa is the first and foremost of all loa. When a service is held for Marassa, he is given foods and beverages that all children love.

769 Rites for the dead continue endlessly for the living. Before a child is witness to a death in his own family he may observe many rituals for the family ancestors, twins, and the unknown dead. For those who are a part of Vodoun, the cycle is a perpetual one in an endless system of integration and continuity.

775 776 764 Special rites are held to remove the loa from the head of a deceased person. It is believed that the spirit of a person who has not had his loa removed will be restive and perhaps will even cause difficulties for his family and his descendants. And there is also the matter of the loa's welfare. The *maît' tête* is, in a sense, a captive in the head of the person who has died. The head is his home. But should the corpse be taken to the graveyard without the loa's having been removed, the loa would refuse to be buried

3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
SV3 Haiti SV3

steadying his attention, he practically hypnotizes him back into full consciousness. As soon as the possessed is normal again, water out of the calabash is poured at the central post and a sign of the cross is made with the candle before it.

Contrary to the expectation of thrill-seeking white visitors, the Vodun dance does not merit the name of an orgy. True, the dancers wear their old clothes, for they are going to have violent exercise; true also, those who are possessed give the impression of losing some of their inhibitions. But the dancers do not embrace each other as at a white man's dance; the drinking which occurs is hardly ever excessive; and the climax of a successful dance is a religious experience. The Haitian is no more obsessed by sex than is the American; indeed, living simply and without many of the artificial restraints of "civilization," he is probably less so. What white visitors sometimes see, under the impression that they are witnessing a Vodun dance, is nothing more than a secular Saturday night social dance. It, too, has drum rhythms instead of an orchestra, musical instruments being rare in Haiti; but the dance has no more religious (or "Voodoo") significance than a barn dance in the United States.

Creed and practice go hand in hand in Haiti. The Vodun worshiper believes in the loa of his faith and does the things necessary to get in touch with them. These conceptions are the major part of his creed, as the corresponding actions form the bulk of his religious activity.

A few articles of the creed remain. "I believe in respect to twins ..." Hundreds of so-called primitive peoples see in twins some special significance, now fortunate, now tragic. Many of the tribes along the Atlantic coast of Africa thought of twins as an omen, so that the presence of ritual regard for them in Haiti is hardly surprising. It is probably incorrect to speak of the worship, or the cult, of twins, for they are not deified, nor is there a common ritual for them: thousands of persons pay them no homage whatever. One family has a high regard for twins because it has numbered them among its ancestors or recent relatives; another family pays respect to all twins because a priest has advised seeking the good luck which comes from *marassa* (twins). There seems to be some confusion of thought about this aspect of religion: twins are not gods, but merely omens from the gods; yet sacrifices are made to them. Christmas and harvest are the usual seasons for the offering. Food is prepared in the morning

3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
SV3 Haiti SV3

and set apart on special plates in a separate room for them; in the afternoon the family eats the food. If the twins to whom homage is being offered are still alive, they must wear special clothes at the sacrifice.

"I believe in the careful cult of the dead . . ." Once more it is necessary to renew one's acquaintance with primitive and folk belief to grasp the Haitian attitude. Life is desirable, death is dreaded; both death and the dead are feared. In the actual world, any excursion from the comfortably familiar countryside of one's home leads to confusion and bewilderment. Except in the company of his fellows (on a religious pilgrimage to the waterfalls at Ville-Bonheur, for example), a Haitian almost never leaves his valley or mountainside and market town. Sophisticated people view the unknown with pleasurable excitement, for they have learned by experience that the unfamiliar is not necessarily frightful; it is quite the contrary with simple folk, whose meagre experience with the unfamiliar has been at least somewhat alarming.

Death is the ultimate unknown. The fearsomeness the imagination conceives to lie beyond death seems to exist in almost direct proportion to people's ignorance of the material world. The fear of ghosts is a commonplace among primitive folk, as among the uneducated in the "civilized" world. Where ghosts are considered powerful, one part of any comprehensive cult will certainly deal with the dead.

In Haitian Vodun the teachings of the Catholic Church have exerted more influence upon the cult of the dead than upon any other part of the religion. The preparation of the corpse for burial shows no traces of African practice; the watch (or wake) and wailing over the deceased is familiar; the funeral itself is conducted by a Catholic priest, with burial in consecrated ground. Thereafter, the continual efforts to secure the tranquil repose of the departed bear the earmarks of faithful Catholic practice; it is at this point, however, that the cult begins to assume distinctive features, for it is firmly believed that the dead exert tremendous power in the world of the living. This power comes from God—the Christian God. The case has been put succinctly by Sumner and Keller: "The relation between man and ghost resolves itself . . . into a relation of rights and duties, with all the rights on one side and all the duties on the other."[30] God gives

30. W. G. Sumner and A. G. Keller, *The Science of Society* (New Haven, 1927), II, 829.